

# Social inequality worsens in New Zealand

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Research by Dr Lisa Marriott, an associate professor in Victoria's School of Accounting and Commercial Law, and Dr Dalice Sim, Statistical Consultant in the School of Mathematics, Statistics and Operations Research, builds on a report produced by the Ministry of Social Development in 2003. On the whole, it reveals that inequality has worsened over the last 10 years for both Māori and Pacific people.

The researchers examined 21 social inequality indicators, including measures of health; knowledge and skills; employment; standards of living; cultural identity; and social connectedness. Increased gaps were found between Europeans and Māori, and Europeans and Pacific people, in most of these areas.

The largest increases in disparity were in cigarette smoking; obesity; suicide (this measure was only reported for Europeans and Māori); proportion of the population with a Bachelor's degree or higher; unemployment; employment; proportion receiving an income-tested benefit; median weekly income; personal income distribution (the proportion of people in the lowest 20 percent of incomes); and internet access in the home.

Decreasing gaps were found in some areas—although the gaps remain significant. These include life expectancy at birth (this measure was only reported for Europeans and Māori); infant mortality (comparison is with non-Māori and non-Pacific people); and early childhood education participation.

Dr Marriott says the only measure that suggests worsening outcomes for Europeans when compared to Māori and Pacific people is housing affordability. "This measure relates to the proportion of households of that ethnic group where housing costs are at least 30 percent of disposable income," she says, "and statistics show this worsening for European households and improving for Māori and Pacific households, although on the whole European households are still better off."

Household crowding, which was defined as a household where at least one more bedroom is required, has decreased for all [ethnic groups](#), although gaps between Europeans and Māori, and Europeans and Pacific people, remain large.

The gap is closing between Europeans and Māori regarding the number of school leavers with a minimum of NCEA Level 2 or equivalent, but there is an increasing gap between Europeans and Pacific people.

"Rates of tertiary education participation is the only measure where a gap no longer exists. Although participation has increased for all ethnic groups, there has been such a large increase for Māori and Pacific people that participation rates are now similar.

"Despite considerable attention paid to the issue of inequality, the data outlined in our research indicates that New Zealand's strategy to address inequality as it relates to Māori and Pacific people has not been successful.

"We are seeing worsening outcomes for Māori and Pacific people, and even in cases where disparity is reducing, the gaps with the European population often remain large.

"This growing gap in inequality clearly warrants greater government attention to stop the problem getting any worse," says Dr Marriott.

**More information:** The complete report is available online:  
[www.victoria.ac.nz/sacl/about/ ... rs-of-Inequality.pdf](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/sacl/about/...rs-of-Inequality.pdf)

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